

STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER K. JARVI, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR PARTNERSHIPS, INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION, VOLUNTEERS, AND OUTDOOR RECREATION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 5132, TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT A SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY TO DETERMINE THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF INCLUDING IN THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM CERTAIN SITES IN MONROE COUNTY, MICHIGAN, RELATING TO THE BATTLES OF THE RIVER RAISIN DURING THE WAR OF 1812

July 13, 2006

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 5132, a bill to direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study to determine the suitability and feasibility of including in the National Park System certain sites in Monroe County, Michigan, relating to the battles of the River Raisin during the War of 1812. The Department supports H.R. 5132. However, we believe that funding should be directed first toward completing the previously authorized studies.

H.R. 5132 would direct the Secretary to carry out a special resource study to determine the national significance of sites in Monroe County, Michigan associated with the battles of the River Raisin on January 18 and 22, 1813, and their aftermath. The Secretary would consult with Federal, state, and local government entities and other interested groups and organizations during the study process.

A special resource study would provide alternatives for the appropriate way to preserve, to protect, and to interpret these sites and resources. Those alternatives would include recommendations on whether the area could be included as a new unit of the National Park System, as part of an existing unit of the National Park System, or determine if the Federal

government is the most appropriate entity to manage the site. This study will also determine what tribes were involved in the historic battles. We estimate that the costs of completing this study would be approximately \$250,000 to \$300,000.

The battles of the River Raisin were one of the largest engagements and the most tragic of the War of 1812. They were fought where the River Raisin enters Lake Erie at Frenchtown, or present day Monroe. Only 33 of the 934 American soldiers who fought in the battles escaped death or capture. The massacre of wounded soldiers by Indians on January 23, 1813, shocked people throughout the Northwest Territories. This was later known as the “Massacre of the River Raisin.”

The battles began on January 18, 1813, when an American force under the command of General James Winchester arrived at Frenchtown. Against orders, General Winchester had moved his army into Michigan when he heard that the British planned to burn Frenchtown. The Americans, reinforced with 100 men from the River Raisin, defeated the smaller British force and quickly routed them into the woods a mile north of the settlement. The British, with a force of 597 British and Canadian soldiers, 6 canons, and 800 Indians from a variety of tribes, however, headed back to Frenchtown on January 22 and launched an attack on the unprepared Americans.

The fighting had been raging for 20 minutes when the U.S. 17th infantry, camped on the right in an open field, was flanked by Canadian militia and Indians. Orders were given to retreat to the river and make a stand. The retreat became a disastrous flight for Ohio. Of the 400 Americans who ran, nearly 220 were killed, and about 147 were captured, including General Winchester.

The remaining 500 Kentucky militiamen successfully repulsed three British attacks; but after his capture, General Winchester advised them to surrender. The Kentuckians reluctantly surrendered, after insisting on terms that the American wounded be protected from the Indians.

The British hurriedly withdrew, due to heavy casualties and news that more Americans under command of General Harrison were nearby. The American wounded were left behind in the homes of the settlers. On the morning of January 23, all of the British guards left. The Indians returned to the River Raisin. They plundered homes and the wounded for valuables, and then killed and scalped Americans who could not walk. Bodies were tossed into burning houses that the Indians had set aflame. Those able to walk were claimed by the Indians and taken to Detroit where they were ransomed. Over 60 unarmed American wounded were killed. Americans in the west rallied to the flag. Eager for revenge, their battle cry became “Remember the Raisin!”

The River Raisin was left a desolate, nearly abandoned settlement for eight months following the massacre. It was liberated on September 27, 1813, when Colonel Richard M. Johnson’s Kentucky cavalry, led by men from the River Raisin, rode into the settlement. Although the British could not return, destruction was so severe that the River Raisin settlement remained desolate and impoverished for five years after the battle.

Currently, the site of the main battlefield is occupied by an abandoned paper mill and listed as a brownfield site. However, the city of Monroe has received a \$1 million grant from the Clean Michigan Initiative to remove the structures and mitigate any polluted soils. An archaeologist

will monitor the removal and cleanup activities at the site, which has recently been transferred to public ownership.

The city of Monroe, Michigan has sponsored a National Historic Landmark nomination which has not yet been submitted. Preliminary evaluations are that the site would qualify. There is intact archaeological evidence of the site; and archaeologists within the National Park Service's Battlefield Protection Program say that if the archaeology is preserved, the site has impressive integrity as a battlefield.

That concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.